

8:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Welcome & Opening Remarks

*Rose A. McMurray, Associate Administrator
Traffic Safety Programs
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*

Good morning.

On behalf of Secretary of Transportation Slater, welcome to Washington, D.C. and the Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting's Speed Management Workshop.

All of us at the US Department of Transportation, especially those of us with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Highway Administration, are proud to be partners in convening this diverse group of experts who share an interest in traffic safety, and a specific interest in speed management.

This workshop is an important step forward in finding new solutions to reduce the number of speed related crashes, and obtaining voluntary motorist compliance of speed laws and other traffic laws.

Dedicating a day workshop to speed management is long overdue. It is an issue that affects every highway user, every day. This issue could easily consume several days of the TRB Annual Meeting.

Nevertheless, this workshop is important because we know that sensible, realistically set speed limits which are firmly, and fairly enforced will lead to:

- a reduction in vehicle crashes,
- fewer injuries and fatalities,
- reduced economic losses,
- reduced need to enforce,
- restoring credibility and public confidence, and
- an increase in voluntary compliance.

Today's workshop brings a new approach to speed management--a holistic-systems approach--bringing to the table various management, research and operational levels from each discipline concerned with traffic safety.

During the workshop, we will discuss:

- the methodologies used for setting realistic speed limits;
- the public's perception and acceptance of speed limits and enforcement efforts;
- existing and new--advanced--speed setting and enforcement technologies;
- engineering issues;
- judicial considerations; and,
- lessons learned through both domestic and foreign experiences in speed management.

Today's workshop is about developing a partnership with experts from all these groups, both public and private, to discuss the issues and identify actions that you can take back to your communities and apply

as you determine necessary to accomplish your specific goals and to meet your specific needs in reducing traffic crashes and the resulting death and injury.

This will be a hard working day. You the participants will do the work and the product of this workshop will be accomplished solely through your efforts.

The messages today from the speakers are not instructions or recommendations, but are intended to provoke and stimulate you to think about the issues in a new way.

Isn't it strange that here we are today, the beginning of a new century, discussing speed issues? Especially since speed limits are one of the oldest strategies for controlling driver behaviors.

In fact, speed limits outdate the automobile.

Many early cities had laws that prohibited riding a horse faster than a "trot" on city streets. Much like today's speed laws, I am sure they were considered unrealistic and unfair, and were almost impossible to enforce.

Recall the scenes from the ol' westerns of the cowhands coming into town Saturday night, riding their horses at full speed, six-guns a blazing. Doesn't really look much different from today except that now it's cars, not horses.

Recall the marshals in those movies? Were their efforts to bring "traffic" safety to the streets of the old west really appreciated?

Imagine how history would have been changed if Paul Revere had been stopped for violating Massachusetts's "trot" law!

Connecticut was the first state to impose the first maximum speed limit for automobiles of 8 mph within cities in 1901.

Since then, with the exception of 21 years of a federally mandated maximum speed limit, the primary responsibility for setting speed limits has remained with state and local governments. This is where the responsibility belongs.

In 1995, with the repeal of the National Maximum Speed Limit, state and local officials asked the federal government for guidance in speed setting criteria. In response to these requests, a study--jointly funded by NHTSA, FHWA and the Centers for Disease Control--was conducted by the National Academy of

Sciences.

In 1998, the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Committee for Guidance on Setting and Enforcing Speed Limits, a 17-member panel of multi disciplinary experts, published a review of existing criteria and summary of new criteria to be considered when establishing and enforcing speed limits in the United States.

The TRB Special Report # 254, shown here, (*Managing Speed: Review of Current Practice for Setting and Enforcing Speed Limits*) identifies and discusses the most effective methods and practices used to set speed limits.

So that we all start this workshop with the same frame of reference, let me talk briefly about what the report says.

- **The current framework for setting speed limits was developed in the 1920s and 1930s.**
Each state has a basic speed law that requires drivers to operate their vehicles at a speed which is "reasonable and prudent for the existing conditions." While these laws are very vague, they provide a lot of enforcement flexibility.
- **Speed limits are legislated by road class and geographic area.**
They generally apply to all roads of a particular class throughout the jurisdiction. Most states and local governments have the authority to set speed limits to fit specific road or traffic conditions. As an example, in most states, secondary two lane rural roads are posted at 55 miles per hour regardless of the surrounding environment or the volume of traffic.
- **Speed limits are generally set based on judgments about appropriate tradeoffs among public safety, community concerns and travel efficiency.**
These speed limits are for ideal conditions, where you have good weather, free-flowing traffic and good visibility, and drivers are expected to slow down, often operating under the posted speed, when the conditions deteriorate.

These methods of setting speed limits assume that all drivers are capable of deciding the speed at which they can safely travel. So, if we assume that drivers are capable of making reasonable decisions about safe driving speeds, why are speed limits even necessary?

Anyone who drives the overly congested Interstate 95 south between Washington and Richmond, VA, or north to Baltimore, MD, can tell you why. Despite extraordinary congestion and extremely hazardous conditions, I've seen drivers out there at speeds out that would make Richard Petty envious.

The primary reason for setting speed limits is to regulate those drivers who do not use, or will not use, good judgement, those drivers who do not make good decisions about safe speeds and consequently pose a significant risk to other drivers.

Drivers like these, with a high tolerance for risk, may decide to drive fast, accepting implicitly, a higher

probability of a crash without consideration of injury or death, in exchange for a shorter trip time. This type of driver does not seem to take into consideration the risk he or she is posing on other highway users, including pedestrians and cyclists.

Every vehicle crash causes medical and property damage costs on society that are not fully, and often never, reimbursed by the driver.

Another reason for regulating speed comes from the inability of many drivers to judge the capabilities of their vehicles correctly and to anticipate roadway geometry and roadside conditions well enough to determine appropriate driving speeds.

This reason may not be as relevant for experienced drivers under familiar circumstances.

However, inexperienced drivers or experienced drivers operating in unfamiliar surroundings may underestimate risk and make a bad speed decision. Even a driver familiar with a particular road can make a bad decision because of impairment, fatigue or other factors, as an example, they are shift workers driving to and from work each day, parents driving children to school or other routine driving activities.

Finally, a major reason for regulating speed is the tendency of some drivers to underestimate, or misjudge, the effect their vehicle's speed has on crash probability and injury severity. We see this particularly in young and inexperienced drivers who may never have been involved in a motor vehicle crash and consequently, cannot relate to the trauma these crashes may cause themselves and other drivers.

But if we are going to realistically manage speed, then we must consider the elements involved. As we do our work today, we must consider how speed affects each of these elements and discuss how they impact traffic safety.

- The roadway--its characteristics, its design and safety features. We also must consider how weather impacts the roadway during rain, snow and icy conditions. Within the US DOT, this element is primarily the responsibility of the FHWA.
- The vehicle--performance and safety standards and crash worthiness of the vehicle. This includes safety features such as seat belts and air bags. Within the US DOT, this element is primarily the responsibility of NHTSA.

Both of these, the roadway and the vehicle, are relatively easy to regulate and manage.

Lastly, but the most important element, is the driver. This one element of the driving system is responsible for the largest percentage of crashes and is the hardest element to manage and the hardest element to change. This element, the driver, is every ones' responsibility.

Therefore, driver behavior is crucial to any speed management program. Without public attitudes that restore credibility for speed limits and personal behaviors to comply with those limits, a speed management program cannot be successful.

Without these two critical factors, public credibility and personal compliance, we will continue to struggle in our efforts for reducing speed related driving behaviors and speed related crashes.

At the US Department of Transportation, we formed a Speed Management Team to address the issue of speed as it relates to each of these elements and how it impacts traffic safety.

The Speed Management Team, a multi modal team consisting of members from NHTSA, FHWA and other Department of Transportation agencies, meets regularly to carry out DOT's commitment to speed management.

Since I've mentioned the US Department of Transportation's Speed Management Team, this would be an excellent opportunity to recognize and publicly thank those individuals responsible for organizing this workshop.

First, I want to thank the workshop organizers:

- **Suzanne Stack** a Highway Safety Specialist with the Federal Highway Administration Office of Highway Safety Infrastructure and a Co-Leader for the US DOT Speed Management Team;
- **Dr. Donna Nelson**, Director of the Maryland Transportation Technology Transfer Center at the University of Maryland and the Safety and Enforcement Team Leader for the ITS America Benefits, Evaluation, and Cost Committee;
- and lastly, **Earl Hardy** of my staff. Earl is a Highway Safety Specialist with the Traffic Law Enforcement Division and the NHTSA Co-Leader for the US DOT Speed Management Team.

In addition to the workshop organizers, I want to extend my appreciation to the members of the Agenda Setting Committee for their outstanding work in establishing today's agenda. This Committee worked with the organizers in determining the topic areas for today's presentations and in selecting today's speakers.

Unfortunately, not all of the Agenda Setting Committee members could be here today, however, I would like for those present to stand and be recognized as I call your name.

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Agenda Setting Committee

K. Craig Allred, Director, Highway Safety Office, Utah Department of Public Safety.

Judge Peter M. Evans, County Court Judge, Palm Beach, Florida.

Judge Karl Grube, County Court Judge, St. Petersburg, Florida, and, currently serving as the NHTSA Judicial Fellow.

Earl Hardy

Thomas Hicks, Director, Office of Traffic and Safety, Maryland State Highway Administration

Garrett Morford, Special Assistant to the Associate Administrator, Office of Traffic Safety Programs, NHTSA.

Dr. Donna C. Nelson

Charles "Chuck" Peltier, Division Chief, Traffic Law Enforcement Division, NHTSA.

Suzanne J. Stack

Roy Sumner, Senior Vice President, PB Farradyne.

Dr. William C. Taylor, Professor, College of Engineering, Michigan State University.

Colonel W. R. Whittington, Louisiana State Police, Louisiana Department of Public Safety.

These individuals are dedicated traffic safety advocates and have worked hard to ensure that today's workshop will be a success.

Finally, I would like to recognize other members of the US DOT Staff and Speed Management Team present and here to support this workshop:

- Richard Compton, Jim Onder, Joe Ann O'Hara, Sandy Richardson, Barbara Rhea, and Elza Chapa with *NHTSA*;
- Larry Brown and Jim McCauley with the *Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration*; and,
- Joe Peters and Amy Polk with *FHWA*.

Back to the issue.

Speeding--exceeding the posted speed limit or driving too fast for conditions--is one of the most prevalent factors contributing to traffic crashes in the United States.

In 1998, speeding was a contributing factor in 30 percent of all fatal crashes. Over 12,000 people were killed and 600,000 were injured in speeding-related crashes. In addition, the economic cost to society in terms of medical expenses and lost-work time of speeding-related crashes was estimated to be \$27.7 billion.

Some may argue that the number traffic deaths are declining despite the end of the National Maximum Speed Limit.

However, we must also remember that during this same period of time, we have seen a significant improvement in vehicle integrity and an increase in seat belt usage making crashes more survivable.

But speed related death and injury has remained a consistent problem during this same period. Those of

us in the transportation industry must continue to devote our efforts to find new solutions and new ways to provide a safe traffic system.

While the principle objective of speed limits is to improve safety, we know that simply posting a speed limit does not guarantee the desired behavior or an improvement in crash statistics.

Managing speeds through speed limits requires a system of speed laws and a process for establishing reasonable speed limits, as well as active and effective enforcement efforts, meaningful sanctions, and public information and education--ideally all working together.

Again, why is today's workshop important? It is important because the information you gain by participating in this workshop can guide you in developing, or improving, your communities' speed management program.

Let me close with a reminder of why today's work is so critical:

- restoring credibility and public confidence
- increasing voluntary compliance
- reducing the need for enforcement
- reducing economic losses
- reducing vehicle crashes
- and SAVING LIVES

This workshop is about what you give each other. We know that we will not solve this problem today--in one eight-hour workshop--but we hope that this workshop starts a movement toward improving speed management. A movement in this new millennium that seeks new partnerships and establishes new programs that leads to a restoration of credibility, not only to speed laws and regulations, but for all traffic laws.

Thank you.